

THE LCP AND POTTERY OF NUBIA, A WORKSHOP HELD MAY 22ND-23RD, 2018

Thoughts and realizations

- The results of current projects indicate that there is very little imported pottery from beyond Sudan, at least in the later periods represented at the workshop. In general, such vessels account for less than 1% at every site (even Meroe) where such statistics are available (for earlier and later times, no such data have been collected in a useful way). The majority of these imports (in the period represented, that is Napata, Meroe and later) come from Aswan producers. The Nile cataracts and the deserts created significant barriers to long-distance transport of both goods and ceramic vessels.
- Further south, in Ethiopia, the evidence reflects a single period of migration and influence from Arabia, meaning from the east, apparently in the 8th/7th c. BCE. This episode of east-west connection did not lead to further travel north up the Red Sea or the Nile, nor to a series of secondary developments with Levantine cultures and polities.
- In terms of its ceramic history and profile, the workshop confirmed what we already expected, which was that Sudan was never part of the Levantine world. Occasionally items (and, probably, people) from this world arrived but for the most part Sudanese developments have been *sui generis*.
- Ceramic classifications are in the early stages because few sites have significant deposits of well-stratified, well-preserved material (this is work in progress). Groups are defined according to shapes, decoration, technique (wheel-made, hand-made), & clay. The common/preferred terminology is 'fabric' and 'fabric group,' generally defined by **clay + preparation technique + firing + decoration + function/shape**. Although few researchers are using the term 'ware', in fact these 'fabrics' are the equivalent of wares as defined on the LCP (<https://www.levantineceramics.org/glossary>):

Wares: When potters working within a single tradition produce vessels with distinctive shared characteristics, such vessels may be considered as belonging to a single ware. Shared characteristics may include at least two of the following: 1) a single petro-fabric, meaning the same clay source; 2) the same manufacturing processes, including preparation, forming, and firing; 3) the same approach to finishing and decoration; and 4) a specific suite of shapes. In such cases, archaeologists may assign a single ware name to a given group of vessels (e.g., Red Polished Ware or Eastern Sigillata A). Potters may manufacture vessels of the same ware for a limited time or over a long period, and even over several centuries. Over the course of a ware's production, potters may introduce new shapes and stop producing others. For this reason, the date range for a specific shape in a given ware may be shorter than that ware's overall production dates.

Ware Families: Sometimes a certain approach in decoration or firing will be so broadly popular that multiple producers will manufacture their own versions. One such instance are the Ptolemaic-Roman Black Slipped wares in Egypt, which are always vessels for table use fired in a reducing atmosphere and finished with a black polish/burnish. Without petrographic analysis, it is often difficult to assign specific examples to a particular manufacturer. In such cases, site-specific wares can be seen as belonging to a more general ware family.

- Petro-fabric groupings mirror those from Egypt, but can be recognized as specific to Sudan:

- alluvial/Nile clays – as in Egypt, these be cannot be further distinguished by specific source, but only by preparation
- wadi clays, meaning washed down from the mountains
- kaolinitic clays, many (most? all?) from Aswan region: kaolinitic wadi clays; highly kaolinitic; and pure kaolinitic
- On the basis of the projects represented at the workshop, it seems that function is more important than forms/shapes, largely because hand-made vessels were not mass produced; they tend to differ in small ways but have similar functions: cooking; food preparation and serving; bread trays; water storage; incense burners; qadus/irrigation pots; coffee pots; beer jars and bottles.
- There is a lot of decoration, and many specific types and patterns. Is there a set of consistent names and terms? Should there be?

The question of whether we should open the LCP to Sudan remains open. On the one hand, the very specifically Sudanese character of ceramics from all periods, the very low number of imports (with the reservations voiced above), and the comparative rarity of ceramic exports from this region elsewhere, all combine to suggest that the addition of ceramics from Sudan will not be much use to researchers working outside of this region. On the other hand, it may be helpful for researchers working in Sudan to be able to add their few imports, from Aswan and elsewhere, both to let others know of the appearance of these vessels in Sudan and also to be able to easily show others their fabrics and receive helpful feedback.

Researchers working in Sudan must decide for themselves – and also be ready to address the following issues and needs:

Issues:

- will project directors allow information to be put on the LCP?
- how many active projects? how much published data already exists?
- will people use LCP be willing to add their fabric classifications within the schema developed for the LCP (on which see attached summary sheet), or will they insist on keeping project-specific names and classifications?

What would be needed to add Sudan to the LCP:

- regional divisions and names
- period designations and dates: Napatan; Meroitic; post-Meroitic; Funj
- additional options in manufacturing techniques for hand-made vessels: pinching and hollowing; coiling; paddle and anvil; forming over mold; forming In a mold. Perhaps Anna Wodzinska could make a sheet of examples and images?